



# Welaka Gazette

*March 2022*

## **From The Mayor's Desk**

In this month's From the Mayor's Desk, I want to talk about a serious subject on everyone's mind in Welaka, which is the Bass Pro Shop Project, more specifically how it will affect the charm of Welaka and property values and taxes. I started and built my administration on transparency and keeping the Town residents informed about what is happening in the Town of Welaka, so I feel the need to address it now.

After the article that ran in the Palatka Daily News and on First Coast News, I received a phone call from Mr. Johnny Morris, the owner of Bass Pro Shop. We had, what I felt, was a very productive discussion about the project and how it would affect Welaka. He asked me to communicate to the residents of Welaka that he has no intentions of taking over the Town or hurting it in any way. He shared a story with me of driving into Welaka in his pickup truck for a fishing tournament in the late seventies and seeing a sign that said "Welcome To Welaka, the Bass Capital of Florida," and he said he became excited about being here. He has expressed his concern for protecting the environment and wildlife, and I expressed our excitement to have a partner on the north end of Welaka that shares our concern of protecting our most important resource, the St. Johns River.

We know dozens of rumors are swirling around about this project, but as your Mayor, my job is to separate fact from fiction and only share what I know to be the truth. Lately, I have come under criticism for not being more vocal on this subject, and there is a very good reason why I have not. The reason is that I did not have any information to share because I didn't know anything. The fact that Mr. Morris reached out to the Town of Welaka is a very good thing because it is the first time the Town has had a direct conversation with him. It shows his desire to keep the Town of Welaka in the loop.

With all that being said, I want to stop and remind everyone reading this that the Town of Welaka is bigger than just Bass Pro Shop, we have existed since 1887, and we will continue to do so. Along with your Welaka Town Council, I have a responsibility to work hard to improve the quality of life for all the residents of the Town of Welaka. We have listened to your concerns both on an individual basis and through your Citizen's Advisory Board. We hear your concerns about the roads, police protection, and more opportunity for people in our community.

When I sat down last July and started looking at the budget and how we could shift things around to meet those needs, I wanted to make sure we were actually doing something and not just putting a band-aid on the problem. In the budget the Welaka Town Council approved, we budgeted a significant amount of money for road repairs, more money than has been set aside in over twenty years. We have also received \$179,556.00 from the American Rescue Plan Act, and we will be

receiving a second payment for the same amount in the next ten months. We have been reluctant to spend it because the government gave us the money and then could not tell us what we could legally spend it on. However, if it were not spent correctly, we would owe them every penny back. I am pleased to say that as of a few weeks ago, the U.S. Treasury has issued a final ruling on the guidelines on how we can spend the money. We will be hosting a Town Hall meeting in the coming weeks where you, as a resident of Welaka, will be able to come out and share with us how you would like to see the money spent. Also, our Public Works department is putting a plan together to re-do our roads covered in millings. I am also working on a plan with Putnam County to do road paving in Welaka that will coincide with paying projects that they are doing in the county so we can save money and get more paving work done.

As I have said before, we have also budgeted for either one full-time police officer or two part-time police officers. I felt it was essential to find the money in the budget because we cannot rely on getting grants to hire more police, mainly because we do not know what grants will be available from year to year. Protection of our residents is too important to place on the hopes we can get a grant for another police officer from year to year. Honestly, the process for hiring another Police Officer is moving slower than I would like, mainly because I am used to moving quickly. Still, I am told by our Chief of Police, Mike Porath, who has conducted countless interviews, and is handling the hiring project, to be patient, that it will be happening soon.

The final area I want to address is residents' concern about having more opportunities for people and protecting our small town charm. This month at the Welaka Town Council Meeting, I will put forth a resolution to create a Welaka Main Committee to help explore the developing downtown area in Welaka on the riverfront. The committee's focus will be to create a downtown that will benefit the Town residents with small retail shops and perhaps even a grocery store to encourage economic development within our historical preservation. If we do not take action now, the Town of Welaka will be at the mercy of any real estate developer with enough money who wants to come to Town and build whatever they please under the confines of our current zoning ordinances. This is why we must act now if we are going to preserve the character of Welaka and the history of our Town.

In closing, I would like to ask everyone to please continue to take an active role in your Town government. Too often, I hear words like "I heard it through the grapevine," or "rumor has it." Instead of being a part of that, reach out directly to myself and your Town Council. Reach out to not only myself as Mayor, but your entire Welaka Town Council to let us know what you like and what concerns you have about our Town. Our contact information is included in this Newsletter every month. As I said earlier, a few people have been critical of me, and all I am trying to get accomplished is to better the Town and the lives of our residents. I promise you I care about my community and every resident that lives here, and I want nothing but the best for Welaka. If I can do anything for you or if you have a question or concern, my cell number is (386) 559-7080. My email address is [jwatts@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:jwatts@welaka-fl.gov). I welcome the opportunity to hear from you.

Best Regards,  
Mayor Jamie Watts

## **From The Council President**

At the last Town Council Meeting, I asked for volunteers for the Historical and Cemetery Committees. The request has also been posted on Facebook, and the Town has received lots of interest from our community. However, we are still looking for more people willing to volunteer, as we

have lost the majority of our members from relocation and illness. We are at a point where new members need to be added to sustain these committees.

Some have asked if there are any specific requirements to participate, such as any special knowledge or skills. The answer is no! The only qualification you need is an interest in the historical background of the Town and a willingness to attend meetings. These meetings will be held each month at times decided by the committee's consensus. Most often, members have been members of both since the scope and nature of these committees tend to overlap.

Occasionally, we hold activities or events to raise awareness of the history of our community. We hosted the Crescent City JROTC for a cemetery cleanup during the last weekend of February. It was a pleasure to serve with the youth of our extended community, plus the left with a greater appreciation for our Town's history.

We have a couple of long-term goals that we would like to see happen. Achieving statewide historical designation for Oakwood Cemetery is one. Another idea recently discussed is to create a self-guided walking tour of the cemetery. It would provide a historical account of some of our most prominent citizens.

If you have additional ideas or are interested in serving on these committees, please contact me at [jfinch@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:jfinch@welaka-fl.gov).

In Your Service,  
Jessica Finch, Welaka Town Council President



## **Need A Meeting With Your Mayor?**

To schedule a meeting with your Mayor, please go to [www.MayorWatts.com](http://www.MayorWatts.com) and select the date and time that works for you.



## ***DO YOU HAVE NEWS FOR THE TOWN OF WELAKA??***

**PUBLISH IN THE WELAKA GAZETTE!!**

*For more information, please contact Welaka Town Clerk Meghan Allmon at [TownClerk@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:TownClerk@welaka-fl.gov) or call her at (386) 524-4010*

## **February's Recognitions and Proclamations**

- Proclamation 2021-01 declaring February 2022 as Black History Month in the Town of Welaka

If you would like to recognize a Town of Welaka resident for dedicated community service to our Town, a local student with exceptional grades, or to nominate a Town resident who is celebrating a landmarked birthday such as turning 100 years old, please contact our Town Clerk, Meghan Allmon at (386) 524-4010 or email: [townclerk@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:townclerk@welaka-fl.gov). We will be happy to recognize them at our next Council Meeting by public recognition.



## Eyeglass Recycling – How You Can Help

South Putnam Lion Club would like to remind you that you can drop your unused glasses by Welaka Town Hall in the dropbox in the main hallway. Donate glasses and change someone's life. Imagine if you could help a child read, an adult succeed in their job, a senior maintain their independence, and provide our community with more opportunities to grow and thrive.



## Welaka 3rd Saturdays Makers Market

On March 19th from 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM the Welaka Woman's Club will be hosting a Maker's Market including Food, A Bake Sale,

Artisans, Crafters & Flea Market Finds. Their address is 644 CR 309, Welaka Fl. 32193.



## Need To Report An Issue Or Make A Codes Complaint?

Need to report a street or parks issue or make a Codes Enforcement Complaint report online at [www.TellTownHall.com](http://www.TellTownHall.com)



## Helping Hands of Welaka Toy Drive

Helping Hands of Welaka is collecting toys to give out to the children who attend the Welaka Christmas Parade & Festival in December of this year. If you would like to donate please contact Harriet Vanslyke at (631) 764 - 2308

## Welaka Town Council Election

The Town of Welaka will hold its Town Council Election on March 8, 2022, from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. at The Church of Welaka located at 638 3rd Ave, Welaka, FL 32193. Voting is only open to residents who live in the Town limits of Welaka, which will show as voting percent four on your voter's ID card. This is the same voting precinct residents vote at during county, state, and National Elections.

Official General Election Ballot  
March 8, 2022  
Town of Welaka  
Putnam County, Florida

Ballota Oficial de la Elección General  
8 de marzo de 2022  
Pueblo de Welaka  
Condado de Putnam, Florida

- Instructions: To vote, fill in the oval (●) completely next to your choice.
- Use only the marking device provided or a black or blue pen or marker.
- If you make a mistake, ask for a new ballot. Do not cross out or your vote may not count.
- Instrucciones: Para votar, llene por (●) completo el ovalo que está al lado de su selección.
- Use solamente el dispositivo paramarcas provisto o una pluma o plumón negro o azul.
- Si comete un error, pida una ballota nueva. No lache porque su voto podria no contarse.

<p><b>Town Council Member</b> (Vote for Two)</p> <p><b>miembro del ayuntamiento</b> (Vote por Dos)</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Jessica Finch</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Eddie Johns</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Alexa "Lexi" Peronard</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Kathy L. Washington</p>
--

Immediately after the voting polls close that evening the canvassing will be moved to Welaka Town Hall 400, 4th Ave. Welaka, Fl. 32193. At 7:30 PM the Welaka Town Canvassing Board will convene in the Town Council Meeting room and oversee the counting of the votes by the Putnam County Election Supervisor. The entire proceedings are open to the public and we invite everyone to come out that evening and watch the election results for the Welaka Town Council as they come in.

## **TOWN OF WELAKA CONTACT LIST:**

### **Welaka Police Department**

#### **Michael Porath - Police Chief**

Direct Line: 386-524-4015  
Town Hall Extension: 107  
[mporath@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:mporath@welaka-fl.gov)

### **Welaka Municipal Services**

#### **Meghan Allmon - Town Clerk**

Direct Line: 386-524-4010  
Town Hall Extension: 102  
[townclerk@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:townclerk@welaka-fl.gov)

### **Welaka Utility Department**

#### **Kendrea Welch - Utility Clerk**

Direct Line: 386-524-4016  
Town Hall Extension: 103  
[kwelch@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:kwelch@welaka-fl.gov)

### **Welaka Building Department**

#### **Justin Morris - Building Inspector**

Direct Line: 386-524-4013  
Town Hall Extension: 105  
[building@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:building@welaka-fl.gov)

### **Parks Department**

#### **John Stuart - General Maintenance Supervisor**

Direct Line: 386-546-2338  
[jstuart@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:jstuart@welaka-fl.gov)

### **Code Enforcement**

#### **Pauline Kinney - Codes Enforcement Officer**

Direct Line: 386-530-0336  
[codes@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:codes@welaka-fl.gov)

### **Mayor's Office**

#### **Mayor Jamie Watts**

(386) 467-9800 Extension: 101  
Direct: 386-524-4009  
[jwatts@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:jwatts@welaka-fl.gov)

### **Welaka Town Council**

#### **Council President Jessica Finch**

386-467-9800 (Option 7, Option 2)  
Town Hall Extension: 200  
[jfinch@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:jfinch@welaka-fl.gov)

#### **Councilwoman Marianne Milledge**

386-467-9800 (Option 7, Option 3)  
Town Hall Extension: 201  
[mmilledge@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:mmilledge@welaka-fl.gov)

#### **Councilwoman Tonya Long**

386-467-9800 (Option 7, Option 4)  
Town Hall Extension: 202  
[tonyalong@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:tonyalong@welaka-fl.gov)

#### **Councilwoman Kathy Washington**

386-467-9800 (Option 7, Option 5)  
Town Hall Extension: 203  
[kwashington@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:kwashington@welaka-fl.gov)

### **Welaka Town Attorney**

#### **Patrick Kennedy - Town Attorney**

Direct Line: (386) 244-4910  
[townattorney@welaka-fl.gov](mailto:townattorney@welaka-fl.gov)



**GFWC WOMAN'S CLUB OF WELAKA, INC.**



644 County Road 309  
P. O. Box 154  
Welaka, FL 32193  
386-467-9706



**9th Annual Golf Tournament**

**The Oaks Golf Club**

**Saturday, March 5, 2022**



Rain date: Saturday March 12, 2022

Scramble - Captain's Choice: 1st \$200 and 2nd \$100  
Closest to the Hole - Men and Ladies \$25 each  
Club Member: \$40 Non Member: \$50

We need Players, Sponsors, and Gift Certificates.  
We need your help to make this our most successful tournament ever!

**Pick up a Form:** The Oaks Golf Club, Woman's Club on Tuesday, or call Dee or Carol (numbers below)

**Forms returned by or before February 12th Receive \$2 free Raffle Tickets**

Immediately following the Tournament, enjoy a complimentary luncheon at the Oaks Club prepared by the Welaka Woman's Club and get results of all Winners, Raffle Prizes and 50/50.

**A portion of proceeds will be donated to the Crescent City High School Band**

Questions? Call Dee 386-546-2754 or Carol 904-347-7758

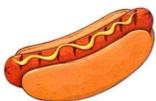
Organized 1959  
MEMBER

General Federation of Women's Clubs International  
GFWC Florida Federation of Women's Clubs

*SpringFest*

**COMMUNITY BLOCK PARTY**

**Saturday, March 12  
10am-1pm**



**FREE**



Bounce House \* Games \* Face Painting  
Hot Dogs \* Snow Cones \* Popcorn

Displays by:

- Putnam County Sheriff's Office
- Welaka Police Dept.
- Welaka Fire Dept.
- Welaka National Fish Hatchery
- Florida Dept. of Health



**THE CHURCH** of Welaka  
683 C.R. 309, Welaka, FL

**The Town of Welaka Presents**

**Food  
Truck  
Friday**



**Join Us:**

**April 1, 2022  
5:30-8:30pm**

Every First Friday of  
the month starting 4/1

**Location: Jefferson  
Smith Park, Welaka, FL**

**Open to  
the  
Public**

DJ spinning your favorite tunes and hosting family friendly games!  
Residents and guests are encouraged to bring chairs, blankets, and bug spray.  
Come enjoy the festivities!

Details on participants will be posted prior to the event.

# More pieces of Welaka's Black History

By SARAH CAVACINI  
Palatka Daily News  
scavacini@palatkadailynews.com

WELAKA - Former Mayor Cedric Milton comes from a family of history-makers and that includes himself, too.

In 1984, the Welaka resident made history as the town's first Black mayor. Before him, Milton's grandfather, Ed Smith, was Welaka's first Black police chief.

"I feel like I made history because living in a small town, the only restaurant you had, you had to go to the window to be served," Milton said about segregation in Welaka. "You couldn't go inside."

He sat on the Welaka Town Council for four years before running for mayor and got paid \$100 a month as the town leader. It's something Milton said he probably would not do again.

"One lady made a comment (that) because I was a Black man, she was going to move out of Welaka," Milton said about him being elected mayor. "Me and her ended up being good friends after."

## GROWING UP IN WELAKA

Although Milton was not entirely sure on the dates, he said Thursday he remembers his grandfather was the first Black police chief in town. Milton also remembers the day members of the Ku Klux Klan burned a cross in Jefferson-Smith Park when he was a child.

"They set different hate letters in the mail to different post offices, and my granddaddy ... came around and gave me a rifle," Milton said. "I sat on the front porch waiting for somebody to come right in and act up. Nobody never came because they burnt the cross and then disappeared."

Fellow Welaka resident Patricia McCoy also remembers that night. She recalls seeing the cross burn at the Elm Street park but isn't too sure about the year.

When McCoy's son was growing up in the 1980s, the former mayor remembers him coming home from

## HONORING BLACK HISTORY



Tyler Gordon

McCoy said.

Still, the group of residents who sat at the Town Hall pavilion in Welaka on Thursday sharing their stories did not mention any other Klan run-ins.

Some racism in the town still existed, however.

Milton said when the schools became integrated and the Black students joined White students in Crescent City, the racism was worse there than in Welaka.

"I had to actually deal with it. No parents could help you there," he said, adding that he got into a fight or two back in high school. "You're in school, so you've got to deal with it, so I stayed in trouble."

The former mayor had a "lot of animosity" until he found God.

However, Harriet Vanslyke said the Welaka community was strong. There was no need to lock doors, everyone looked out for one another's families and no one went hungry, she said.

"It was 'we,' whether you were blood or not. We were still family," she added.

baseball practice crying because he had seen a group of Klan members in their robes holding a meeting at a P o m o n a P a r k church.

"He was so scared when he got home. He had never experienced anything like that,"

## LEADING THE COMMUNITY

Milton's grandfather, the first Black police chief in Welaka, could not arrest White offenders for years. He would need a White deputy to take them into the Putnam County Jail, while Black offenders stayed in town at a separate jail only for them, Milton said.

The first time Smith arrested a White man and took him to jail was the night a local preacher killed his wife, showed up to Smith's house and confessed, according to Milton.

"(My grandfather) said, 'No, I don't need no help.' He put the man in the front seat," Milton said. "He put himself in the front seat and carried him to the Putnam County Jail."

According to McCoy, her uncle, Tyler Gordon, was the town's first Black deputy but also couldn't arrest White offenders.

In other firsts for Welaka, Willie Washington Jr. made history when he was elected to the Town Council - a first for the local Black community in 1968. Not long after, the Town Council became predominantly Black when the town elected George Barlow and Emmanuel Johnson Jr. to join Washington on the council.

Washington passed away nearly one year ago, and his daughter, Kathy Washington, was appointed to serve out the rest of his term.

Although times have changed some, and Milton has no desire to run for mayor again, Black residents of Welaka are still proud of their town and its history.

Vanslyke said she did not live in Welaka when Milton was elected mayor, but she is proud of her town because Milton getting elected means some White residents voted for him.

"That's some pride right there that nobody has to give me, I've already got (it)," she said. "That's a big pride right there."

Copyright 2022 by Palatka Daily News - all rights reserved.

# MARCH 2022

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
27	28	1 Charter Review Committee Meeting 5:00 PM Welaka Town Hall	2	3	4	5
		8 Welaka Town Council Election 7AM - 7PM The Church of Welaka 683 CR309 Welaka			11 Citizens Advisory Board Meeting Welaka Town 9:00 AMHall	12 Spring Fest Community Block Party 10AM - 1PM The Church of Welaka
6	7 Trash, Recycling & Yard Debris Pickup		9	10		
					18 Putnam County Fair Mar. 18th - 26th 118 Fairgrounds Road, East Palatka, FL	
13	14 Trash & Recycling Pickup	15 Welaka Town Council Meeting 6:00 PM Welaka Town Hall	16 Water Meter Reading Day Charter Review Committee Meeting 5:00 PM Welaka Town Hall	17 Zoning Board Meeting 6:00 PM Welaka Town Hall		19 Welaka 3rd Saturdays Makers Market Welaka Women's Club 9AM - 3PM
	20	21 Trash, Recycling & Yard Debris Pickup	22 Code Enforcement Meeting 6:00 PM Welaka Town Hall	23	24	25
						26
27	28 Trash & Recycling Pickup	29	30	31	1	2